

Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa

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How effective national and transnational collaborations are managed: The key lessons from research

Siv Vangen,
The Open University Business School, UK



the research base

- definition of collaboration:
any situation in which individuals work together across organizational boundaries to achieve something that they cannot achieve on their own
- work with people directly involved in collaborative initiatives (ongoing since 1992):
consultancy, facilitation, awareness raising, in depth interviewing, method development, government task force, direct involvement
- concerned with social issues such as:
economic development, poverty alleviation, community care, health promotion, learning disability, education, unemployment, the environment, community planning
- and the commercial sector such as:
supply chain alliances, property alliances, pharmaceutical marketing, PFI

Why collaboration ?



community representative
community development partnership

we found an IT solution to
sharing information when
everyone told us we couldn't
do it

Why collaboration ?



chief operating officer utility
partnership

We've delivered ahead of
time with reduced cost and
better quality

Why collaboration ?



OU partnership manager

There is this great burst of enthusiasm and excitement – it's been absolutely fascinating, bizarre and amazing

Why collaboration ?



...when it works well you
feel inspired ... you can feel
the collaborative energy

**collaborative
advantage**



... something is
achieved that
could not have
been achieved
without the
collaboration



...when it works well you
feel inspired ... you can feel
the collaborative energy

common rational for collaboration

- access to resource; financial, technological, expertise
- shared risk
- efficiency
- co-ordination and seamlessness
- learning
- moral imperative; *there is no other way*

However...

we had great expectations ... after two years the partnership committee said we'll stop that ... no business case could be made



Why not collaboration ?

we have been cuddling each other for 10
year but we've made little actual
progress



Why not collaboration ?

... the (collaborative) project has worked out but, oh boy, it has caused pain



senior health
promotion officer

... the rate of output is slow ... even successful outcomes involve pain and hard grind



**collaborative
inertia**

**collaborative
advantage**



... something is
achieved that
could not have
been achieved
without the
collaboration

... the rate of
output is slow ...
even successful
outcomes involve
pain and hard
grind



**collaborative
inertia**

understanding collaboration

... oh boy, it has caused pain



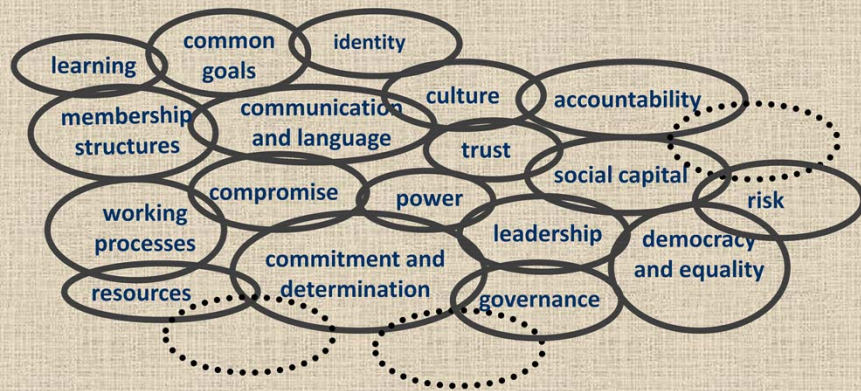
why inertia rather than advantage



... you can feel the collaborative energy

understanding collaboration

focus on issues recognised by those involved as causing anxiety and reward in collaboration



understanding collaboration

focus on issues recognised by those
involved as causing anxiety and reward in
collaboration



managing goals

common wisdom

the success of collaborations depends on the extent to which partners' goals are congruent, shared and agreed

organisational and individual agendas frequently make it difficult to agree goals

common practice



Tension between positive and negative rationales for promoting congruence or diversity of goals in collaboration.

At the principle level, congruence of organizational goals is argued to be essential because joint goals for the collaboration can be easily aligned to partners' goals and this thus increases their commitment to the collaboration. Diversity of organizational expertise and resources is, however, perceived to be essential to gaining truly synergistic advantage from collaborating, but this, in turn, implies diversity of organizations' goals. What makes the paradox, at the principle level, particularly noteworthy, however, is that the achievement of collaborative advantage can also be hindered by both congruence of, and diversity between, organizations goals. Too much homogeneity in goals can make organizations reluctant to cooperate and share information; too much heterogeneity leads organizations to seek different and sometimes conflicting outcomes.

At the enactment level, an assumption that runs through the literature is that agreement between organizations on joint goals for a collaboration is a requirement for its success; the presumption is that collaboration goals cannot be enacted unless they are explicitly acknowledged by all participants. Paradoxically, however, the same literature also points to numerous difficulties associated with reaching such agreement in practice. For example, organizations may have different

expectations

that result in conflict; resource constraints can make compromises difficult; organizations may view policy implementation goals differently and agreement, when it is reached, may not move beyond a rhetorical commitment.

managing goals

common wisdom

the success of collaborations depends on the extent to which partners' goals are congruent, shared and agreed

I wanted a clear vision, a set of aims and a clear set of outcomes. And without that I wasn't prepared to play ball.



Director of Environmental Services

managing goals

Dimensions	Types
Level	the collaboration, the organizations, the individuals
Origin	members, external stakeholders
Authenticity	genuine, pseudo
Relevance	collaboration dependent, collaboration independent
Content	collaborative process, substantive purpose
Overtness	explicit, unstated, hidden

Issue manifestations

- e.g. individuals seek to incorporate own goals,
- e.g. external parties influence the agenda,
- e.g. expressed goals may be purely nominal,
- e.g. irrelevant goals creep into the agenda,
- e.g. process goals may be more important,
- e.g. real goals may not have been expressed

Congruence between organizations goals tend to be the spur for initiating collaboration. However, both congruence at the individual level and of collaboration processes can help overcome lack of momentum. And even an external goal may enable partners to recognise their congruencies. Our research however, suggests that goal diversity is far more prevalent than goal congruence. This diversity can lead to expanded and unwieldy agendas, confusion, misunderstandings or just apathy.

First, it is highly unlikely that all the goals will be in harmony. Second, it is highly unlikely that any individual participant will know or understand more than a portion of the goals that are at play. Third, differing

perceptions lead to a low degree of mutual understanding even where there is individual knowledge or understanding. Fourth, because the entanglement is in a continuous state of flux, any mutual understanding of each others' goals - and hence any agreement over a collaboration goal - tends to be short lived.

This analysis does not challenge the notion that agreement on joint goals for a collaboration is desirable but, since it explains why that is inherently difficult to achieve, it does question the practicality of this as a requirement for success.

A tangled web of goals

Genuine, congruent goals for a collaboration exist if at all in an entanglement of other goals that are both real and imagined.

Goal diversity is far more prevalent than goal congruence.

A dilemma in terms of strategies for identifying common objectives and agreeing on goals...

One the one hand

e.g. Goal diversity can yield expanded and unwieldy agendas, confusion, misunderstandings or just apathy.

One the other hand

e.g. Too much scrutiny can reveal irreconcilable differences.

e.g. Goal congruence that provide momentum for the collaboration can appear in surprising ways

**collaborative
advantage**



... the bringing
together of different
resources and
expertise provide the
basis for getting
advantage from
collaborating

... joint actions
must satisfy many
different agendas



**collaborative
inertia**

the practical conclusion

**sometimes it's best to get started on some action
without fully agreeing on goals**

we have to write a
statement of aims to
justify our existence ...
my job is to find a way of
writing it so that none of
the parties involved can
disagree



manager, area regeneration
partnership

managing culture

common wisdom

If you are going to work collaboratively with another organisation there must be shared values and culture

Partners will bring to the collaboration different ways of being, interacting and working

common practice

managing culture

The organisation has a difficult culture and they're very politically motivated, they get messages from on high that send them all into a bit of a spin



Partnership Manager
Public - Private
Partnership

Encountering otherness

Cultural awareness is necessary to understand the issues affecting a collaboration

managing culture

For a year I sat on the SIP [partnership] board as a nodding Dove... I hadn't a Scooby what they were talking about...



Community
representative

Incompatible professional cultures

Terminology may not readily translate across
organisational and cultural boundaries

managing culture

Work in spite of our systems, even with the best partnership we've got, we're struggling and clunky



Head of Business
Development

Incompatible organisational cultures

Things that are easy to do in your organisation may not be straight forward to do in another

managing culture

I do it sneakily - I arrange things sneakily rather than put it in the budget



Partnership Manager,
Russia, Rumania,
Hungary, the Czech
Republic, Slovakia and
Bulgaria

Incompatible national cultures

Things that are expected in one culture
may not be acceptable in another

**collaborative
advantage**



... the bringing
together of *difference*
(resources and
expertise) provide the
basis for getting
advantage from
collaborating

... joint actions
requires a
resolution of the
points at which
different *cultures*
intersect



**collaborative
inertia**



Flexibility, accommodate the intersection of different cultures. **Rigidity** preserve distinct organisational cultural resources.

Autonomy, Individuals need to act on behalf of their organisations. **Accountability**, Organisations' interests must be protected.

Complexity, Embracing complexity is necessary to harness resources. **Control**, Control is necessary to steer the joint agenda forward.

managing trust

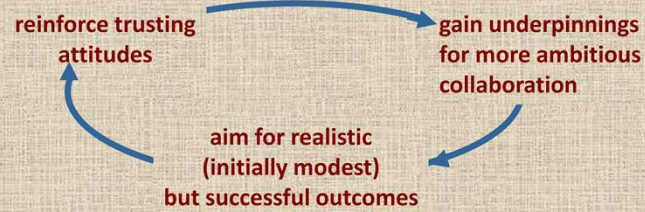
common wisdom

trust is a precondition
for successful
collaboration

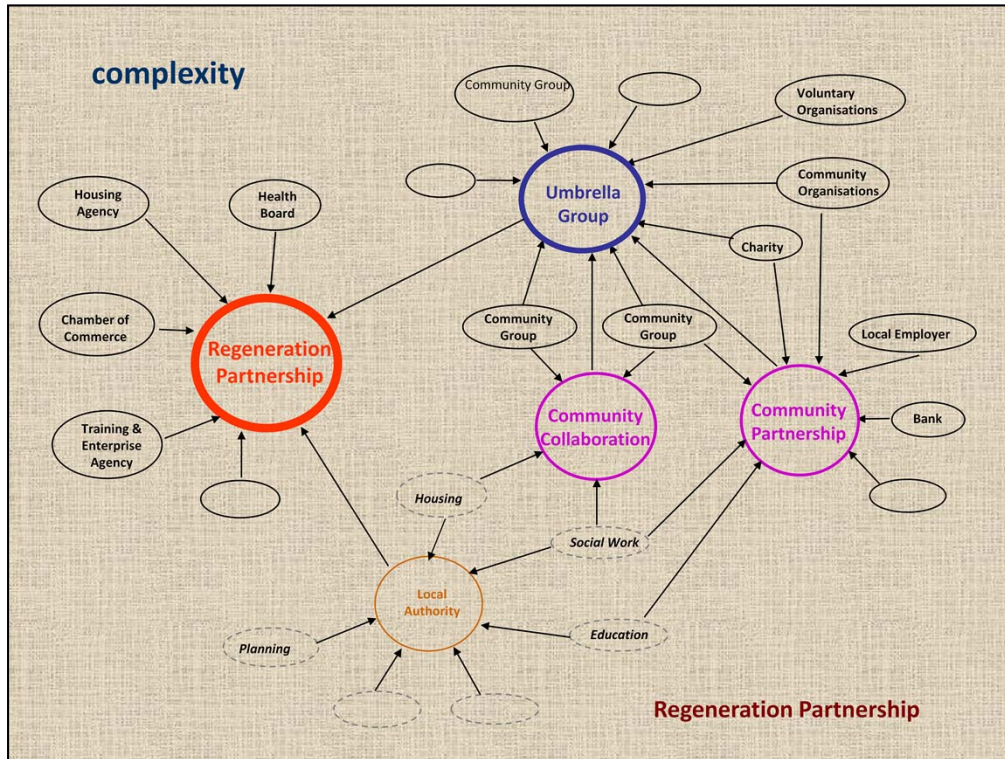
suspicion is often the
starting point -
partners are needed
where trust is weak

common practice

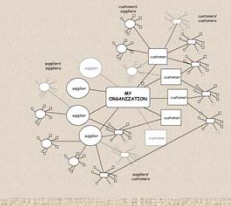
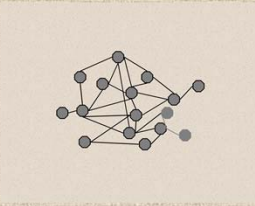
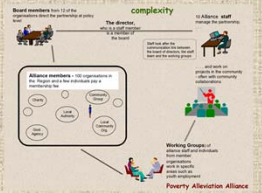
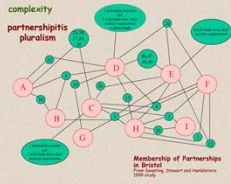
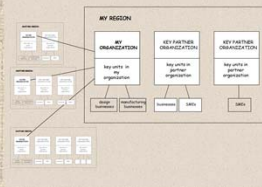
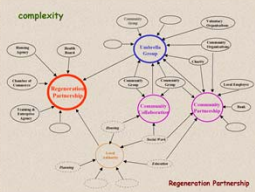
research says



the trust building loop



managing complexity



dynamics

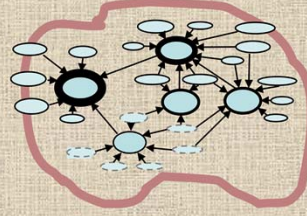
collaborations tend to be *dynamic*, “movable feasts”

- organisational restructuring and mergers
- new strategies
- new government policies and incentives

will change the structure and purpose of existing joint initiatives

and individuals *will* make career moves

it's hard to
agree goals, accommodate cultural
diversity,
communicate and build mutual
understanding, manage power
relationships, build trust
and
maintain continuity



in
complex, dynamic structures



dynamics make the
trust building loop
fragile

Making it happen ...

What does leadership look like?

nurture, nurture, nurture

in the spirit of collaboration ...

EMBRACING

embracing
the “right” kind of
members

Example Challenge

Embracing those who would
like to be involved when
representation of
stakeholders is problematic.

EMPOWERING

empowering
members to enable
participation

Example Challenge

Creating infrastructure
through which all members
can be enabled to participate
in spite of inevitable
differences in skill levels.

in the spirit of collaboration ...



involving
and supporting all
members

Example Challenges

Involving all members
although they have
unequal role and power
positions in the
collaboration.



mobilizing
members to make things
happen

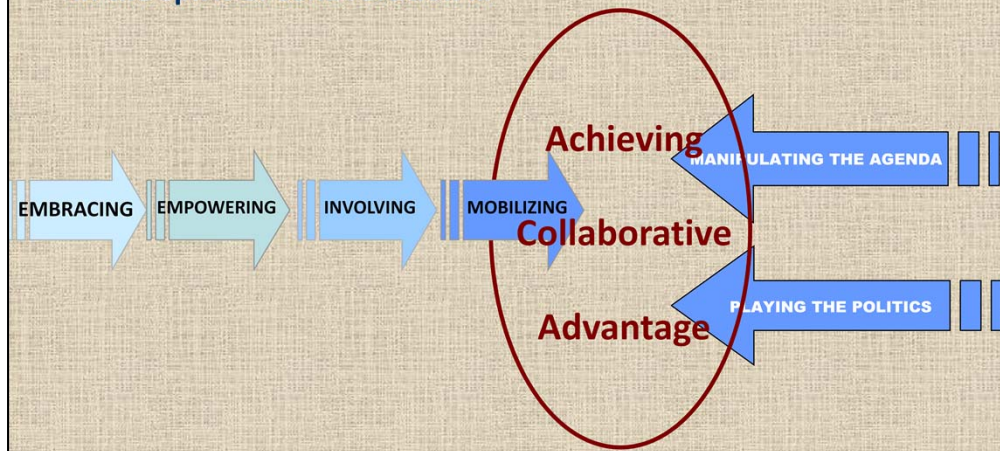
Example Challenges

Encouraging members to
work on behalf of the
collaboration while
recognizing that they need
something in return.



Making it happen ...

in the spirit of collaboration ...



... with a little collaborative thuggery

**? those who lead successfully operate
from both perspectives and continually
switch between them ?**



representative,
health partnership

... partnership means going
behind people's backs in a
trustworthy sort of way

our conclusions ...

contradictions, tensions and dilemmas

complexity

multiple views

dynamics

frustration of intention

our conclusions ...

collaborations are by nature *inefficient*

use them sparingly

energy should be reserved for situations
when real collaborative advantage can be
envisaged

our conclusions ...

achieving collaborative advantage
requires compromise, energy,
commitment and care

nurture, nurture, nurture

our conclusions ...

Recognizing success ...

Substantive outcomes

- Varied, relative and not same for all partners

Process of collaboration

- building social capital

Emergent milestones

- not planned but emergent semi-serendipitous

our conclusions ...

serendipity and success ...

“the right people from different organisations came together at the right time”



“we also tried and abandoned many other collaborative initiatives; this is the one that worked”



enhancing serendipity

Say something about success:

May relates

our conclusions ...
**managing to collaborate
involves**

understanding the complexity



... everything I thought I
knew about how to
achieve change doesn't
feel good enough

accepting the pain



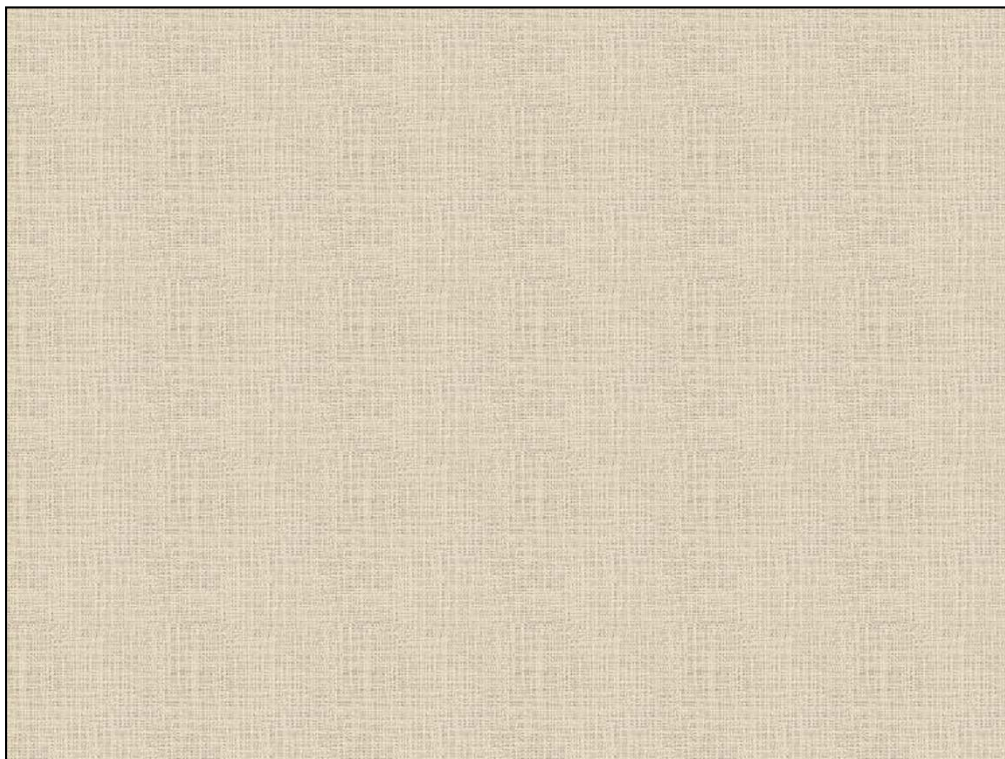
it is a relief and a
reassurance to see that the
pain and grind of
partnership work exists in
other partnerships, not
just my situation

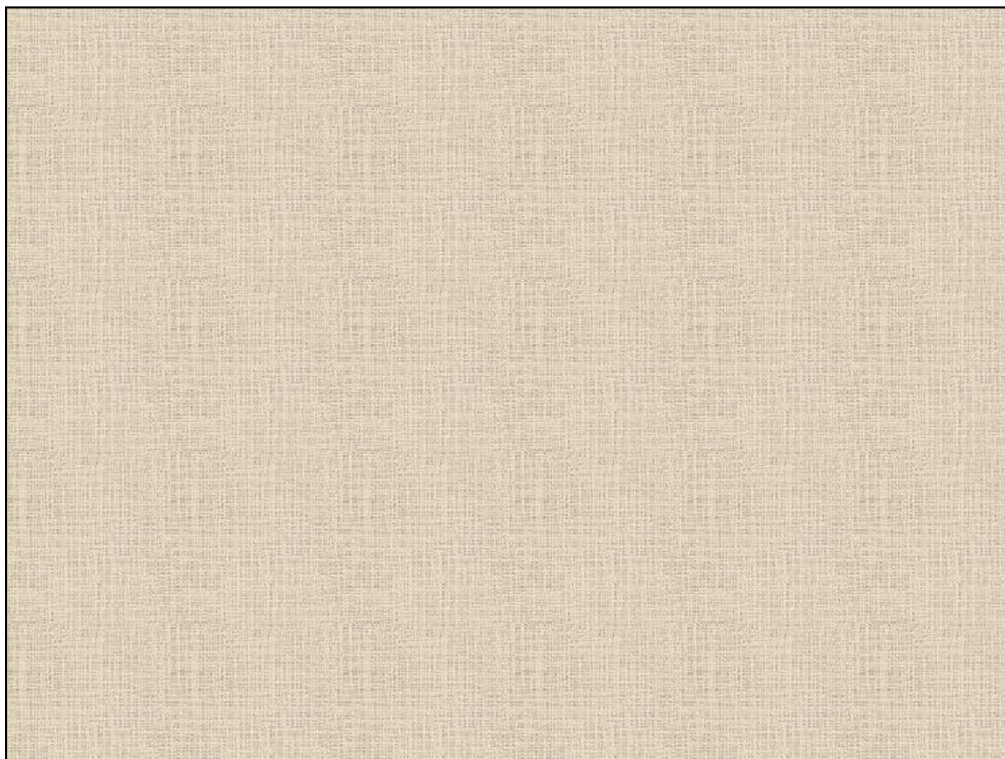
**using the available tools as conceptual
handles to aid thinking**



I am beginning to
understand what is
going on

knowing *what* to nurture







**Managing to Collaborate: the theory and practice of
collaborative advantage.**

Chris Huxham and Siv Vangen 2005. Routledge.